

# Center for **Children's** Advocacy

University of Connecticut School of Law  
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## TESTIMONY OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF ACTS CONCERNING TEEN DATING VIOLENCE EDUCATION

February 23, 2009

This testimony is respectfully submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a nonprofit organization based at the University of Connecticut School Of Law that provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. My name is Josh Michtom, and I am a Staff Attorney at the Center. I have worked on many cases involving teens on a variety of legal issues. **The Center for Children's Advocacy is asking you to support House Bill 5706, House Bill 5768, House Bill 6494, and Senate Bill 474, all of which concern Teen Dating Violence education.** This is an opportunity for Connecticut to address the important issue of violence between teens. I would ask you to consider the approval of any of these measures a chance at prevention. You can help prevent the development of future domestic abusers and of domestic abuse victims by encouraging schools to develop and implement healthy relationship curricula to prevent teen dating violence.

As you are no doubt aware, as elsewhere, domestic violence in Connecticut is widespread and costly, both to the families that suffer it and to the State. Between October 1, 2003, and September 30, 2005, more than 72 percent of the crime victims served in Connecticut with federal grant funds were domestic violence victims.<sup>1</sup> Research suggests that the violence in these households often has deep roots. Violence in adult relationships may be part of a pattern that was established early, and may be more serious if established during adolescence.<sup>2</sup> A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded that "Violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications for victims: Many will continue to be abused in their adult relationships and are at a higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, and suicide."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, in these first relationships formed in adolescence, violence is not uncommon. The U.S. Department of Justice has concluded that *females ages 16 to 24 are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than any other age group – at a rate nearly three times the national average.*<sup>4</sup> The Center for Children's Advocacy's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic at Hartford Public High School sees this problem among the student body. For example, a 16-year-old student contacted the clinic because her 22-year-old ex-boyfriend had been threatening



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<sup>1</sup> Biennial Activities Report, Oct. 1, 2003 – Sept. 30, 2005, Office of Victim Services, State of Connecticut Judicial Branch.

<sup>2</sup> V.A. Forshee et. al., Health Education Research, 11(3) 275-86 (1996); S.L. Feld and M.A. Strauss, Criminology, 27, 141-61 (1989).

<sup>3</sup> Jay G. Silverman et. al., "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy and Suicidality," Journal of the American Medical Association (2001).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99 (Oct. 2001, rev. 11/28/01).